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NOFORN

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TAGS: PTER SA  
SUBJECT: SAUDI ARABIA'S MOST WANTED

Classified By: CDA David Rundell, 1.4(b), (d)

KEY POINTS

¶1. (U) Saudi authorities published a list of their 85 most wanted militants February 3. The story, complete with photos of the wanted men, was splashed on the front pages of Saudi newspapers.

¶2. (U) The announcement included a plea for the 85 to forsake their erroneous ways and turn themselves in at Saudi embassies and consulates abroad, along with a promise that under the terms of an August, 2008 amnesty offer they would be reunited with their families, although an Interior Ministry spokesman said that "may not happen instantly. There may be a process that might include rehabilitation."

¶3. (U) The announcement asked Interpol to help detain the suspects and return them to Saudi Arabia.

¶4. (U) Two of the suspects are Yemeni; the rest are Saudi nationals, including Saleh al-Qaraawi, identified as the leader of al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia. The list includes eleven Guantanamo returnees.

¶5. (C) The timing and nature of this announcement is likely influenced by recent events such as the appearance of Saudi former Guantanamo detainees in Yemen and the al-Qaeda in Yemen announcement that it would expand operations into Saudi Arabia.

¶6. (S/NF) Post will send list of names septel. Information about the suspects has also been sent via GRPO channels.

COMMENT

¶7. (C) The Saudis' main purpose in publishing the names and photographs of these militants is to make it more difficult for them to operate within Saudi Arabia or Yemen; Post noted Yemeni President Saleh's February 4 call on tribal leaders to turn in al-Qaeda militants.

¶8. (C) Although there is no question the Saudis would like to catch these extremists, the announcement is in some ways disingenuous. The request to Interpol gives the impression the suspects could be scattered across the globe, when in fact most of them are probably in Pakistan/Afghanistan, Yemen, or in Saudi Arabia itself, places where Interpol is unlikely to be of much assistance. Placement in the Saudi rehabilitation program is certainly a possibility for many of these men (though some are recidivists), but so is a long prison sentence.

¶9. (C) Even though an Interior Ministry spokesman said the Ministry would not harass suspects' families, publishing photographs of the men will be highly embarrassing to their families (some of which are "prominent" according to post sources) and tribes, and puts pressure on them to assist authorities in locating and apprehending the suspects. The Ministry spokesman noted that some suspects' families had already contacted the Ministry to report them missing or

assure the Ministry they disapproved of the actions of their  
wayward sons and brothers.

RUNDELL